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SUBJECT: TOKYO MEDIA REACTION - RUSSIA

LEAD STORIES: Front-page items on Tuesday morning include a plunge in public support for Prime Minister Fukuda and a lawsuit asking the central government to pay local residents compensation for mental and physical damage caused by loud noise at a U.S. military installation.

1. "Putin Rein to Continue" The top-circulation, moderate Yomiuri's Moscow correspondent Seguchi wrote (12/18): "With President Putin's official announcement on Monday that he will assume the premiership under President Medvedev, a new political system is in the making, under which Putin will continue to stay at the helm even after he leaves office next May. As Putin is likely to be responsible for decision-making and personnel appointments, chances are high that Russia's 'power center' will shift from the presidency to the premiership."

2. "Focus of Attention on Roles of President, Premier" A Moscow-based reporter for the business-oriented Nikkei argued (12/18): "The focus of attention now regarding the Russian political system will be the division of roles between president and prime minister, given that 'Prime Minister Putin' is likely to hold the same authority as the president, even though the president has a strong mandate under the Constitution. Depending on the power balance between a 'weak president' and 'powerful premier,' management of Russia's political situation could become more difficult.... If the legal mechanisms concerning command and control of the government remain ambiguous,

there could be a power struggle.... In order to ensure a stable government led by President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin, a strict division of labor between the two will be needed."

13. "Accelerated Moves Toward anti-Western Stance" A Moscow correspondent for the conservative Sankei wrote (12/18): "The first shipment by Russia of nuclear fuel to Iran, which is suspected of continuing a nuclear-weapons program, means that the two countries are committed to enhancing bilateral ties with the goal of establishing an anti-American alliance. With the world's two largest energy powers accelerating the process toward forging a relationship beyond 'partnership,' it is becoming likely that an anti-American, anti-European drive will emerge."

SCHIEFFER